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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3351  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1167  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1035  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 1604  
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2195  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

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SENSITIVE  
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STATE FOR SCA/CEN  
USAID/W FOR EE/AA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [ENRG](#) [IR](#) [AF](#) [UZ](#) [TI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN EMERGING AS PRAGMATIC REGIONAL PLAYER

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: The delivery of a significant amount of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and enhanced provision of electricity to Tajikistan, combined with intensified economic cooperation and diplomatic activity in the region, suggest that Turkmenistan's leadership sees value in establishing itself as a responsible regional player. END SUMMARY.

#### TURKMEN HUMANITARIAN AID TO AFGHANISTAN

13. (U) Turkmen and Afghan media reported February 7 that Turkmenistan had sent off a large caravan of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. The shipment reportedly contained 1,000 tons of flour, 500 tons of diesel oil, and 9,000 tons of mostly children's clothing. The donation was to be distributed in forty-two districts in five provinces of northern Afghanistan -- Jouzjan, Faryab, Balkh, Kunduz, Badghis. President Berdimuhamedov and Afghan President Karzai had spoken by phone on January 29, when a decision was made to send this assistance. "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" printed photos of the caravan's sendoff, which included traditional dancers, a dutar musical ensemble, and crowds of balloon-waving students.

14. (U) This is the first direct delivery of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan that anyone can remember coming from Turkmenistan, although Turkmenistan's government has provided other forms of assistance to the Afghans in the recent past. Turkmenistan, for example, financed the reconstruction of a two-kilometer stretch of railroad track from the border at Serhetabat (formerly Gushgi) to Turgundi last year. The government has also been assisting Afghanistan in meeting its energy needs, including construction of power lines and electrical distribution stations, delivery of electricity and liquefied petroleum gas at subsidized rates of two cents per kilowatt hour, and occasional forgiveness of electricity debts.

15. (U) Turkmenistan's leadership undoubtedly supports the

stabilization and development of Afghanistan for pragmatic and strategic, as well as humanitarian, reasons. President Berdimuhamedov, following in Niyazov's footsteps, is continuing to advance the development of a Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline (TAPI), arguing that beyond the advantages for Turkmenistan, the pipeline would provide much-needed income and jobs for Afghanistan, and aid the region's infrastructural development. Additional expansion of Afghanistan's electricity distribution systems and construction of a modern highway infrastructure would benefit Turkmenistan's regional economic goals as much as Afghanistan's.

DOES TURKMENISTAN WANT TO BE A REGIONAL LEADER?

¶6. (SBU) There are other signs that President Berdimuhamedov's goal is to refurbish Turkmenistan's regional image from that of an isolated, impoverished dictatorship to an economically-pragmatic regional partner willing to cooperate on issues of mutual benefit. Turkmenistan is building a solid new partnership with Uzbekistan. In spite of years of troubled bilateral relations while Niyazov was alive, the government has been able to turn the relationship around. Uzbek President Karimov paid an official visit to Ashgabat in late 2007, Uzbek companies recently held a business exhibition in Ashgabat, and the two countries have been cooperating -- at least, when Tashkent is inclined to do so -- to deliver electricity to Tajikistan since November 2007.

¶7. (U) Its electricity deal with Tajikistan has also given Turkmenistan an opportunity to reveal its emerging reliability as a regional partner. Energy shortages have been rampant across Central Asia, due to an exceptionally

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cold winter, and Tajikistan, especially, is close to crisis. Turkmenistan has consistently and reliably exported at least three million kilowatts per day to Tajikistan since November, while Uzbekistan's deliveries have largely ceased since early January. On January 28, after Tajik President Rahmon asked President Berdimuhamedov to increase the desperately-needed supply of electricity, Turkmenistan increased delivery to Tajikistan to 6.6 million kilowatts per day -- when Uzbekistan allows it to be delivered.

¶8. (SBU) Even Turkmenistan's on-going gas dispute with Iran has shown Turkmenistan's government is looking for respect, and is developing the savvy to get it. Ashgabat firmly reminded Tehran that Turkmenistan does not have to do business with its southern neighbor, and that it prefers to work with reliable partners. At the same time, however, Turkmenistan's government welcomed an economic exhibition, as well as a week of Iranian cultural events that included a popular Iranian film festival.

¶9. (SBU) COMMENT: Turkmenistan is surprisingly quickly emerging as a pragmatic and responsible regional player. It appears to be evolving beyond simple, bilateral views of mutual interest to a more strategic perspective of the role Turkmen leaders see the country playing in the future. END COMMENT.  
HOAGLAND